

(Washington D.C.) - "Thank you all for coming. I am proud to be introducing this bill along with my colleague in the House, the Honorable Steve Chabot, and my colleagues in the Senate, the Honorable Charles Grassley and the Honorable Barack Obama.

The purpose of this bill is to correct and finally end the long and appalling documented history of discriminatory treatment by the Department of Agriculture against Black Farmers. Throughout the history of the Department of Agriculture, the country essentially ignored its blatant discrimination against Black farmers. And to add insult to injury, and to silence even the suggestion that there was such discrimination, the civil rights office within the Department of Agriculture was closed down in 1981.

Finally, in 1997, after extensive investigations and findings of historical discrimination by the Clinton Administration Secretary of Agriculture, the *Pigford* law suit against the Department was filed. In 1998, Congress enacted legislation to remove the 2-year statute of limitations barring claims to allow action on claims of discrimination made by Black Farmers dating back to 1983. Then, in 1999, the lawsuit was settled allowing Black farmers who could show that they had made a claim of discrimination between 1983 and 1997 that was not acted on to pursue their claims. However, a deadline was placed on filings of claims.

Unfortunately, 75% of those filing claims were deemed to have filed too late to be considered. All manner of suggestions and speculations have been put forth as to why so many of the claims were filed late. Starting in September of 2004, under then-Chairman Chabot's leadership, we conducted a series of hearings on the issue which found that the Department did not effectively make the opportunity to file claims known to Black farmers in isolated rural areas.

This bill will allow late filers who believe they can substantiate discrimination against the Department to bring the claims forward to be heard and decided on the merits. Some will win and some will lose, but none should be barred from being heard on a technicality.

I truly hope that this Congress will take up this bipartisan bill to provide as many as 70,000 black farmers the opportunity to seek fair and equitable resolution of their claims."

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